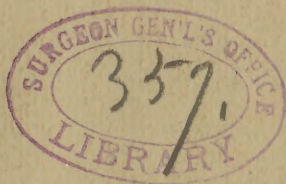


CORSON, (H.)

State Hospitals for the  
Insane Poor.

BY  
HIRAM CORSON, M. D.,  
CONSHOHOCKEN, PA.

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## STATE HOSPITALS FOR THE INSANE POOR.

By HIRAM CORSON, M. D.,

CONSHOHOCKEN, PA.

IN "The New York Medical Journal" for October 6, 1888, page 392, I find some resolutions of the New Jersey Medical Society, condemning what they call the "dual system" of management. The society believed itself called on to give expression to its views on account of some alleged mismanagement in the Morris Plains Hospital, which I therefore infer is organized on the dual system. The system which has long prevailed in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and indeed in all other States where hospitals for the treatment of insane people are found, is what the superintendents in Pennsylvania call the one-head system; the other, the New Jersey dual system, they call the two-heads system, and declare that a hospital thus organized can not successfully be carried on. Now, this one-head system and the other dual system need fairly to be described. The old plan gave to the superintendent the exclusive management of the whole farm and the hundreds of insane males and females, and also the duty of providing everything for the great household of patients and more than a hundred employees. The trustees, generally from seven to nine or more in number, had no power to effect changes of any kind; they were privileged to eat dinner, and authorized to pay bills contracted by



the superintendent, when at stated times they visited the hospital, but they had no power to institute any reform; they were the mere servants of a superintendent, whose power controlled every operation from the purchasing of a hundred thousand dollars' worth of needed supplies to the oversight of the hennery and pig-sty. Such is the one-head system. The other, which our New Jersey brethren call the dual system and which they condemn, and which I infer prevails at Morris Plains, is quite different. It exists at Norristown. There are thirteen trustees, some appointed by the Governor, some by the Philadelphia City Councils, and the others by the Commissioners of the counties composing the "district." I know of no others than this one and the one at Morris Plains organized on this plan. The trustees have the entire control and the entire responsibility. In the *one-head* organizations they have all the responsibility and no control.

As the Eastern Hospital at Norristown has been in operation under the thirteen heads for eight years, allow me to speak of its workings, so that you may know whether the Medical Society of New Jersey has acted wisely in denouncing a plan of management of which they had little knowledge, if any at all.

These thirteen trustees received the buildings from the hands of the builders in a very unfinished condition, and the patients were hurried in upon them at a rapid rate. The physicians were appointed by the trustees for a single year, subject to removal at any time—a male physician for the males, a woman physician for the females. These physicians have no other duties than the medical treatment and care of their patients. The sexes have different departments and the male physician has no more concern in the management on the female side than if he were a thousand miles away. Already we see that in this hospital the trust-



ees govern and the physicians are relieved from all outside work, and have time to attend to every need of their suffering patients. These thirteen heads have introduced another change. They have appointed a skillful woman doctor to have charge of her insane sisters. Now, have these changes worked well? your readers ask; for, if they have, the New Jersey Medical Society may have erred in their denunciation of the *system*. I should be quite willing to abide by the testimony of trustees and physicians who have come from various States to examine their hospital with its 1,666 patients (more than 800 of each sex), and who have gone away convinced that it has no equal in things promoting the welfare of the patients in this country.

For more than forty years the *one-head* system—the plan so unanimously approved by the New Jersey Medical Society—has been in operation in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Has any improvement in the treatment and management of the insane resulted in the hospitals thus conducted? Have there been advances made by the superintendents in a knowledge of mental disease? Have they inaugurated and carried into practice measures calculated to improve the welfare of the insane? No; even the appeals of Dorothea Dix in behalf of the sufferers were unheeded by the *one head*, even when the trustees were anxious for more freedom from restraint and for measures adapted to draw the mind away from its delusions. While in other countries buildings were being erected at less cost, and agreeable employments of various kinds were introduced to engage the minds of the patients and lead them on to sanity, the “Association of American Superintendents” was insisting on an adherence in building to their plan of hospitals of several stories in height and at frightful expense to the State. The suggestion, by men greatly interested in the care of the insane, to introduce the system of employment

which was adopted in the hospitals of other countries with great advantage, and which many boards of trustees in our hospitals earnestly approved, was opposed by the *one-head* power which controlled our hospitals. It was comparatively easy to manage hundreds of insane when, for the slightest disobedience, for even an excess of gayety, or a show of desire to resist an attendant, the door of a cell or dark room could be closed on the witless and innocent offender. So, when greater freedom from restraint and utter disuse of straps and muffs, dark cells and Utica cribs, were advocated by the humane, a deaf ear was turned against any change by the *one-head* managers. Has the so-called dual system done better? We shall see.

The opinions held by the New Jersey Medical Society are not accepted by some who have had ample opportunity to see the workings of the two systems. Two weeks ago a meeting of trustees and superintendents of hospitals in Pennsylvania was held in Harrisburg, where Dr. Thomas George Morton, the chairman of the "Lunacy Board" of the State, made an interesting report of the condition of our hospitals and some suggestions relating to needed improvements. Allow me to quote one of them. It is entitled :

"Propriety of the Board of Trustees relieving the Medical Superintendents of State Hospitals of all Duties other than the Professional Care and Treatment of the Insane." He said :

"As a hospital should be a hospital and not a mere receptacle for the insane, the care of those committed to it should be the primary object of attainment, and whatever operates to retard this end, it would seem, ought to be carefully excluded. In this light it becomes a question of consideration whether the time and attention of a medical superintendent should be, even in a measure, engrossed with matters extraneous to the professional care and treatment of the patients committed to his

charge. Could not the medical superintendent be relieved of the onerous duties and petty annoyances which must come to him in his present capacity as superintendent of an extensive farm and purveyor to a large household, in addition to what must be admittedly his first and most important duty—the medical care and direction of the treatment and oversight of the inmates of his institution?

“Would not the ability to devote his entire time to the scientific study of the individual cases of complicated disease, so abundantly furnished him, with more ample leisure for the instruction and guidance of his medical assistants, result in a larger percentage of recoveries, a more skillful corps of assistants, and a better administration of the wards?”

“Even though a medical superintendent be quite capable of filling the threefold position of physician, steward, and purveyor, ought he not to be relieved in a measure of all cares and exactions which properly could be left to an unprofessional person, which would thus permit his entire time and energies to be devoted to the more legitimate object of his calling as a physician, in improving the condition and restoring to health the patients depending on his skill?”

“The trustees of the Norristown Hospital have taken the advance in this important change in hospital administration, and have given the resident physicians of that institution the largest liberty in the management, throwing the entire medical responsibility on them, and at the same time have relieved them of all work other than the professional care and treatment of the patients.

“The trustees state that ‘the entire relief of the physicians from the business responsibilities of the institution has continued to work most satisfactorily and *greatly to the benefit of the inmates.*’”

Such are the words of that eminent surgeon, member of the Board of Public Charities and chairman of the Lunacy Committee.











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